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DEPARTMENT FOR PA, NEA/ARN, INR/IC/CD, INR/R/MR:STHIBEAULT AND
JMCCARTER, VOA NEWS CA, NEA/PPD:CBOURGEOIS, AZAIBACK, AND
AFERNANDEZ, IIP/G/NEA-SA MDAVIDSON
WHITE HOUSE FOR NSC
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E.O. 12958: N/A

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SUBJECT: Syria-UAE, Syria/Iran, Syrian Press, Lebanon, Iraq,
Palestinian Territories (7/17)

¶1. Summary: Syrian papers on July 17 reported President Asad's meeting with UAE President Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan on July 16. The presidents reviewed bilateral relations and means of strengthening them and hailed the role played by the Syrian-Emirates Joint Committee. They discussed regional developments and stressed continued consultation and coordination between the two countries to enhance Arab solidarity and joint Arab action and to achieve stability and security in the region. Vice President Shara also held a meeting with Emirates Foreign Minister Sheikh Abdullah Bin Zayed Al Nahyan; FM al-Mouallem also attended the meeting. They discussed bilateral relations, current developments in Iraq, Palestine and Lebanon, and efforts to achieve security and stability in the Middle East.

Independent al-Watan featured an interview with Iranian Ambassador to Damascus Hassan Akhtari, on the eve of the visit of the Iranian President to Damascus. He ruled out an Israeli war against Lebanon, Syria or Iran due to the "state of collapse" of the Israeli army and because it would be an extra crisis for the Bush administration. He added that "Syria is strong and Israel has re-assessed its military evaluation of it." He warned that if such a war should break out, US interests under threat in the region would be too numerous to count." He added, "my conviction is that America can't attack Iran, because if it could it would not have waited until now." On Ahmadinejad's visit to Syria, he said the visit is to stress the "depth of coordination and consultations."

All papers reported that a report on freedom of press issued recently by the General Union of Arab Journalists has placed Syria among the first three Arab countries in respecting freedom of the press, giving freedom to journalists and presenting services to them. In its assessment, the report relies, as indications of press freedom, on the degree of newspapers' exposure to full or temporary closing, confiscation of documents or media tools, and owner's interference in papers' work. It also looks at indications of state interference in media content, pressure on newspapers to reveal sources of information, and confiscation of papers after printing. The report didn't record in Syria any violations in any of these indicators. The leadership of the Arab Journalists Union has decided to publish an annual report on Arab Press Day to clarify the situation of press freedom in the Arab world.

End of summary.

12. Selected Headlines:

"President Asad delivers an important speech today after taking the oath. Vice-President Shara: The second presidential term will be a huge national shift" (Government-owned Tishreen, 7/17)

"Presidents Asad and Khalifa bin Zayed discuss the current situation in the region. Both Presidents stress the importance of the continuation of consultation and coordination between the two countries to boost joint Arab action. Sheikh Khalifa offers USD 100 million as a gift to the Syrian people to build a hospital" (Government-owned Tishreen, 7/17)

"Iranian Ambassador to Damascus to Al-Watan: Syria is strong and Israel has re-assessed its military evaluation of it. Ahmadinejad visits President Asad to stress the depth of coordination and consultations" (Independent al-Watan, 7/17)

"Bush calls for an international conference on Middle East peace before the end of the year" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 7/17)

"Syria among the first in the Arab world in respecting freedom of the press" (Government-owned Tishreen, 7/17)

"Battles rage in Nahr el-Bared. An explosive device targets a UNIFIL patrol" (Government-owned Al-Ba'th, 7/17)

"Olmert impedes Abbas with his conditions and announces a state of emergency in the West Bank. Mishaal [HAMAS leader in Damascus] calls for dialogue. Palestinian factions refuse to relinquish arms" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 7/17)

"A new bloody day in Iraq: 300 Iraqis killed and injured in two explosions in Kirkuk. Bush refuses Republicans' call to change US policy in Iraq" (Government-owned Tishreen, 7/17)

13. Editorial Block Quotes:

"A Meeting of Solidarity"

Izz-al-Din al-Darwish, an editorialist in government-owned Tishreen, said (7/17): "The summit between the presidents of Syria and the United Arab Emirates is important for Arab solidarity, especially since the two countries have a close relationship and always work to unify the Arab position and vision toward looming and expected dangers...."

"Arabs cannot stand on their feet without solidarity and effective common action against the enemies...."

"Syria and the United Arab Emirates always stress that the Arab situation is bad and needs complete revision to be able to confront the growing occupations of Arab territories...."

"This bad Arab situation is evident in what is happening in Iraq and Palestine and what is being planned for Lebanon, Sudan, and other Arab countries...."

"All this must be on the agenda of the Asad-Khalifah summit, on which Syrians, Emiratis, and all Arabs pin much hope...."

"One Year After Victory"

Muhammad Khayr al-Jammali, an editorialist in government-owned Al-Thawra, wrote (7/17): "Israel's defeat in Lebanon a year ago continues to shake the Israeli military and political establishments.... The July 2006 war ended with a dazzling victory for the resistance, a strategic defeat for Israel, and the fall of

the American plan.

"It is surprising that a hired faction in Lebanon denies the victory of the resistance, embodying the ugliest forms of relinquishment of the values of patriotism, in favor of mortgaging themselves to foreigners and their conspiratorial schemes against the country and its stability....

"The anniversary of the war, with all its results and repercussions, which have not ended yet, is an important opportunity to remind of the positions of defeatism and to stress that the resistance, which scored the biggest historic and strategic victory against Israel, is able to do the same thing again if Israel thinks of launching another aggression against Lebanon...."

"The Defeatists"

As'ad Abbud, a columnist in government-owned Al-Thawra, wrote (7/17): "The anger of those who were defeated in the July War was much greater than the joy of the victors."

"From the first day of the war, a defeat was inflicted on the official Arab order, which moves toward Israel with almost no constraints, justifying this to the Arab peoples by saying that it is impossible to prevail over Israel or obtain anything from it except through capitulation and pacification....

"On the day Hizbollah managed to capture the two Israeli soldiers, defeat knocked on the doors of Arab palaces and regimes....

"They said it was an adventure. But the adventure turned into a scientific fact in the art of war and fighting. And there was the steadfastness, resistance, and victory, until the defeatists lost their remaining ability to endure. Their minds do not accept the argument that victory is possible, because this places before them responsibilities they abandoned long ago....

"The official Arab order was the first loser in the July War and with it the US Administration and Israel of course....

"If victory is the opposite of defeat, or the antithesis of defeat, what happened in Lebanon a year ago was the biggest victory the Arab nation has known in its history...."

"Disregard of the Brutal Side"

Umar Jaftali, a commentator in government-owned Tishreen, wrote (7/17): "The Western media, particularly the American media, rarely talk about the brutal side of the American war on Iraq, where American soldiers and foreign mercenaries practice atrocities against Iraqi civilians....

"A report was published by The Nation and The Los Angeles Times in which American soldiers tell stories of killing and torture in Iraq....

"Gratuitous killing continues against Iraqis. And after all this, President Bush claims he will turn Iraq into a model of a prosperous, democratic country. What charlatanism are they promoting after they have destroyed Iraq -- land, people, and dignity?"

Corbin